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LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND CROSS-BORDER- STUDENT'S ADAPTION IN CLASSROOMS IN SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KAMPALA, UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

This study is focused on "Learning Environment and Cross-Border Students' Adaptation" in classrooms in selected private universities in Kampala- Uganda. The purpose of the study is to find out how cross-border students adapt socially, physically, cognitively and emotionally to classroom environment which they are subjected to, in private universities found in Kampala. The main objective is to establish relationship between learning environment and cross-border students' adaptation level in private higher institutions in Uganda. The design of the study is descriptive correlation where quantitative and qualitative survey approach is adopted. The researcher selected 4 (four) universities in central Uganda, Kampala. A sample size of 220 cross border students were randomly selected from these universities. Findings reveal that a positive relationship between CBS adaption and their learning environment. The researcher recommends the need for universities that rely on CBS for enrolment boost and its financial implication, to improve their learning environment .Lecturers should endeavor to be more creative and use modern information, communication technological (ICT) equipments and materials in delivery of lectures. Lecture rooms should be computer based and sound proof making them more conducive.

KEYWORDS: Learning Environment, Adaptation, Social, Physical, Emotional, Classroom, ICT

INTRODUCTION

Students come from many different social and cultural backgrounds and in a classroom there are wide variety of diverse students from other cultures and this gives rise to cultural diversity in classrooms (Charney, 1992). It is very important also for teachers to build a healthy environment in the classrooms and thus build strong student relationship in return. This is important as the relationship when strong among lecture and student and student-student, helps to achieve greater responsiveness and higher level goals in classrooms. Building relationship is important in institutions of higher learning and this is supported by Smith (2000) who asserted that building collaborate relationship is composed of interpersonal relationships based on truth, mutual respect and participation which aids in solving complex classroom problems. When effectiveness is considered in lecturerooms, productivity is based on capacity of teacher to perform well in delivery of the lessons to students and also his/her ability to use appropriate teaching materials (Epstein, 2002). This is not the case with efficiency for private universities.. Universities especially privately owned universities, prefer efficient output with little amount of resources involved. Efficient administration in academics is viewed as the biggest advantage a university can have if it is resource hungry but with lesser competitive higher education environment (Ramsden, 1998). As students population increases in the whole world, more students cross their national borders to access universities in other countries where admissions are offered to them with probably less stress than within their own national borders. The number of cross-border students (CBS) are on the increase in many countries because liberalization of education has opened doors to many private individuals and groups to operate within the educational policies and provide education at all

levels. Environments are also changing and as environments change, institutions ought to introduce new practices, imbibe current technology to match changing environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Uganda there is an increasing demand for higher education and this had led to increase in establishment of higher institutions since Makerere University was turned into a full fledged university in 1940 (Ssekamwa, 2010). Makerere's limited capacity for enrollment due to increasing demand for university education has expounded both public and private universities in Uganda. (Ssekamwa 2000).With rapidly growing demand for university level of education, which the government's meager economic means cannot cope with, private institutions sprang up as mushrooms and this has made it difficult for National Council on Higher Education (NCHE) to maintain close monitoring and evaluation pace. Owing to the fact that close monitoring for quality assurance is not possible ,university are now run like business where Darwin's theory seem to work. According to Darwin, it is not just the strongest of the species that survives but the one most responsive to change. But the change in ICT classrooms are not followed by most of these private institutions. According to Kirkwood and Price (2005) too often, it seems technologies are introduced to university teaching with little or no consideration being given to the implications for student learning. For example, adding computer-mediated communication to a classrooms will not in itself generate collaborative or co-operative learning; neither will it induce cross-border students of varying culture to form themselves into a learning community but can enhance better adaptation aptitude. Students and their sponsors understand that learning environments are changing and expect this change in any university across the border since they open their doors to CBS. The changes in diverse requirements of the student body should be accompanied by societal changes too (Kirkwood and Price 2006).They further added that ICT has become life for a large proportion of people in developed and developing world and so should be an integral part of lecture-rooms too. It is important for students to understand that a lecturer may not be using modern ICT because she/he feels students are not yet adapted to new techologies. Garrison and Anderson (2007), believes that without opportunities for reflection upon existing practices and why they might require adaptation, a poor understanding of how and why students might use ICT effectively in learning can result.

METHODS

This study adopted both mixed method design integrating observation, interviewing, questionnaire, and check-list as one database which also helped in checking the accuracy (validity) of the database. The design allowed the researcher collect both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time and this was very useful in interpreting the overall results (Creswell 2014). A check- list was made for learning environment while a questionnaire was used in gathering more data on CBS adaptation in the classroom. The questionnaires were administered in the lecture room and the researcher was on the ground to administer the questionnaire as well as use the checklist. So both pragmatic view and constructivist philosophy were engaged in the study as the researcher was able to harmonize observation and, checklist, interviewing some CBS while engaging them in a focus group discussion.220 randomly selected CBS in 4 selected universities form the sample size. Snowball method of random sampling was used in selecting participants in this research because only CBS participated in this study and the process of data collection went on while the students were in the lecture rooms not while outside. This is to ensure that social, physical, cognitive and emotional adaptations were captured in classroom environment. The researcher also administered the questionnaires and retrieved them on the spot. The data was collated and analyzed.

RESULTS / FINDINGS

Students agree that some classroom materials are enough but not up to expected standard. Most of the lecturers were still relying solely on white-boards and marker to teach. The chairs and benches are not comfortable as some chairs lack arm rest. CBS complained that the classrooms are not conducive and would have preferred a much better learning environment. On observation, some classrooms are disturbed by noisy surroundings and the lecturers struggle to raise their voices while teaching and students are often distracted from outside. Most of the lecture rooms lack basic classroom equipments. The result of analysis on learning environment will be shown using a table.

Table 1: Mean and Interpretation of Level of Indicators for Learning Environment: Computers/Visual Display, Space and Size, Lightening, Sound-Proof (Interference), Chairs and Desks

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Computer / visual display	2.15	Low/ unsatisfactory	3
Space and size of lecture room	1.65	Very low /unsatisfactory	4
Lightening (brightness/ visibility)	2.95	satisfactory	1
Sound proof (interferences)	1.56	Very low /very unsatisfactory	5
Chairs and desks	2.84	High satisfactory	2
Mean	**2.23**	**Low Unsatisfactory**	

Legend Mean Range	Observation Mode	Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Very high	Very satisfactory
2.51 – 3.25	High	Satisfactory
1.76-2.50	Low	Unsatisfactory
1.00-1.75	Very Low	Very unsatisfactory

NCHE (2010) on the state of higher education in Uganda reported that the facilities in lecture rooms are grossly inadequate sitting materials for students. Ortiz (2004) emphasized that safe, healthy and uncrowned classroom facilities are basic ingredients of any educational program

The results obtained this study have shown that computer and visual display materials with mean of 2.15 is unsatisfactory, space and size of lecture rooms are also very unsatisfactory , the most appalling in its state is the serenity of lecture rooms in terms of noise. Most of the lecture rooms are so noisy that one wonders how proper understanding of lectures can be possible. This accounts for the mean of 1.56 obtained from the analysis of data. However, lightening, chairs and desks ranked higher and satisfactory in the classroom environment of private universities in Kampala. In higher institutions the use of ICT in education is getting increasing attention from policy makers in Africa. The support of world bank, Swiss cooperation, DFID and UNESCO seem not be extended to private universities but concentrated on public universities alone. Owing to cost of procuring these equipments, privately owned universities do not find it easily to cope with visual classrooms which is the current trend in lecture rooms for those funded public universities (Farrel 2007). It has been observed also that very low connectivity to internet are seen in private universities and most computers are not for students' use in classrooms (NCHE 2010). This could be why majority of private universities are offering art and humanities more than science, engineering and technology-based courses. Hallack (1990) asserted that facilities and equipment are the major factors influencing academic achievements and outcomes in our university education. The findings of this study seem to agree with this assertion. The implication is that if the CBS are not comfortable in these classrooms, how can they readily adapt socially, physically, cognitively and emotionally? The result of their adaptation is shown in the table following.

Table 2: Level of Student's Classroom Adaptation

Indicator	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
Social	2.65	Very high	1
Physical	1.98	Low	4
Cognitive	2.55	Low	3
Emotional	2.50	Very high	2
Average	**2.37**	**Low**	

Legend	Response Mode	Interpretation
3.26 – 4.00	Very High	Very good
2.51 – 3.25	High	Good
1.76 – 2.50	Low	Poor
1.00 – 1.75	Very Low	Very Poor

Table 2 gives a summary of the man scores of CBS on their adaptation in the lecture rooms. There is low level of adaptation and it is clear from the results that social and emotional adaptation rate higher with mean of 2.65 and 2.50 respectively, but those data are not convincing enough. On the contrary, physical and cognitive adaptation are low and the researcher inquired to ascertain why the low mean scores. The interview revealed that students had expected the physical environment of the lecture rooms to look like the ones they have seen on the university website of some of these private universities. They had prepared themselves for better environment than they had abroad or across borders but some of the lecturer rooms are just lower than expected. They therefore find it difficult to adapt satisfactorily. One student admitted that he often skips lectures because he get cramps when he sits for two hours at a stretch in any of the lecture rooms. Another students submitted that he sits very close to the lecturer up in front row if he is to grasp any concept taught in that lesson. Whenever he is not able to secure adequate sitting position, his preference will be to be absent in that lecture.

On further inquiry, the researcher gathered that this attitude has actually affected most students grade point Average (GPA) at the end of the semester.

This finding is supported by (Colespe and Nakatomi 202) who claimed that innovation and new technologies drive growth, jobs and living standards. That means new environment with less technological advancement affect growth in individuals and do not stimulate economic growth. The best learning environment are ones with high challenges and less stress, vitalized and patterned to student's adaptation

Social adaptation refers to eradication or reduction of social barriers which helps individuals integrate themselves by getting acclimatized to their environment. In higher institutions social adaptation are quite high even in private universities because interactions between gender, culture, races and color are well harmonized. All students are being treated as same group and so CBs are socially adapted

According to Vygotsky's social cultural theory, social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development but in this study, while social adaptation had a high mean score cognitive adaptation score low. A difference of 0.30 in mean could be seen as not significant.

The study established the relationship between learning environment and adaptation. There is a positive and significant relationship between learning environment and classroom adaptation as the findings of the study have shown that Pearson linear coefficient of correlation between learning environment and classroom adaptation has a "r" of 0.014 and a "p" value of 0.01, between the two variables indicating that they are closely related to each other. Simple correlation analysis (r) was used as in bivariate relationship and this indicated that the two variables are linked.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has shown that private university in Kampala are not making serious effort in transforming their classrooms into modern information, communication and technology classrooms (ICT) with visual display equipment and computers to meet the expectation of students who crossed their border to obtain university degrees.

The assertion of NCHE in 2010 still holds water in most private universities in Uganda: that there is inadequate educational facilities and incompatible environment to students convenience. Though this research was not in-depth in checking other facilities outside classroom, there is no doubt that dependability on obsolete teaching and learning aids is still the norm in private universities. Other equipment such as textbooks and reference materials are grossly inadequate (Tam Wai Ming 2008).

It is based on these findings that the following recommendations are made Private universities must endeavor to meet the recommended modern classroom /lecture rooms standards set by NCHE monitoring and evaluation of learning environment should not be overwhelming to school quality assurance and also to external body assigned with this task

Lecturers in private universities should be advised to develop themselves in using visual classrooms as this is the trend

Lecture rooms should be student friendly , sound proof , comfortable seats with writing desks safe and very comfortable for students

Donor agencies and government should pay equal attention to both private and public universities to mention equal and uniform standards in both quality and quantity of education in Uganda

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